

Statement of

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Before the
Subcommittee Public Lands and Forests
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
Concerning
S. 1420 – Outfitter Policy Act
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Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee to give you our views on S. 1420, the Outfitter-Policy Act of 2003, a bill to establish terms and conditions for use of certain Federal land by outfitters and to facilitate public opportunities for the recreational use and enjoyment of the land. I would like to acknowledge the efforts that the committee has put forth to utilize our assistance in developing this legislation. We appreciate the opportunities that have been afforded to us and we look forward to this continued relationship. The Department supports the purposes of this legislation and we would be pleased to work with the committee on this bill.

Outfitters and guides, educational institutions, and organizations provide public services that are essential to the use and enjoyment of our National Forests and Grasslands. The Forest Service recognizes the value of these recreation service partners in achieving management goals, such as providing access to those who might not otherwise be able to use our federal lands, offering interpretation and education opportunities, and helping those who lack specialized skills. The Forest Service manages the outfitting and guiding program by issuing special use permits which authorize this type of activity. We currently have approximately 5,500 permit holders who provide very necessary and sought-after services. We collect approximately \$4 million dollars each year in outfitter-guide permit fees.

We understand and support efforts to improve consistency and fairness in our application of policy and in the administration of permits that this legislation addresses. The Forest Service is currently developing policy that incorporates many of the provisions contained in this legislation. Policy is being developed for an up to ten-year term for outfitting and guiding permits to be consistent with the U.S. Department of the Interior. We are examining ways to reduce the layers of fees that some outfitters and guides face when entering areas that have additional fees, such as entrance or facility use fees.

We are working jointly with the Department of the Interior in developing a joint Forest Service and BLM permit application to improve customer service and make the permitting process more efficient and effective. A suggestion to enhance Service First opportunities would be to incorporate into this legislation a provision to give the Forest Service and BLM authority to issue a single permit for outfitting and guiding which would be valid on lands administered by both agencies and be under the authority of the lead agency that issues the permit. This would further reduce the amount of paperwork and permit authorizations required for outfitters and guides that operate on land under both jurisdictions.

The challenge to us is to provide outfitting and guiding opportunities that are efficient and successful while also providing a pleasant, safe, and healthy visitor experience that protects the environment and addresses public needs. We believe that S. 1420 contains many of the provisions that may help us to accomplish these goals. We welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to advance these objectives.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Department's view on this legislation, and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.